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AUTHOR	Washburne, Vera; Washburne, Norman F.
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Abstract

The objective of the pilot studies was to evolve a course which would increase the confidence and competence of young people to undertake the responsibility of parenthood, as well as to sharpen the awareness and sensitivity of those who had already undertaken this role. Three training groups of students were selected from Lake Erie College and the Community College for Adult Education. One of the groups consisted of seniors contemplating marriage, one consisted of young parents, and another of parents of adolescents. The hypothesis was justified that there would be identifiable recurrent problems or themes in all three groups. These were, as a matter of fact, uncovered by means of two-hour sessions with the students which were taped and analyzed, and these recurrent themes constitute the content of the proposed course which will henceforth be a part of the college curriculum. All of the participating students felt a great need for such a course and recommended that it also be available to high school students as well as to students in adult education. (Author)

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FINAL REPORT
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PRE-PARENTAL EDUCATION

Vera Washburne, Professor Psychology
Norman Washburne, Research Assistant

Lake Erie College
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I. ERIC REPORT RESUME

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A. SUMMARY

In an attempt to achieve increased confidence for assuming parental roles, three training classes were conducted at Lake Erie College, Painesville, Ohio.

Two-hour-long weekly discussions were held which evoked the deep feelings, memories and experiences of the students. These evocative discussions were taped and analyzed for recurrent themes which, together with the individual student research papers now form the bases of a course in pre-parental education. The evocative process will be used, not only because it proved to be effective, but also because it has the additional merit of being revised in every class in terms of the feelings and experiences of the students involved.

Among the most frequently recurrent themes was the problem of harmonizing three basic responsibilities which the students felt caused many conflicts vis-a-vis their families. These were identified as the responsibility to oneself, to one's marriage and to one's children. Another recurrent problem had to do with fallacious understanding of concepts which plagued the thinking of the trainees, particularly when it concerned the parental role. And yet another recurrent theme of major importance was what the students termed "ought-to-be" the Twentieth century parent. They felt that the usual parent-child relationship was anachronistic, and badly needed to be modernized.

All participating trainees enthusiastically and urgently recommended that such a course be made available not only to college students but most particularly to high school seniors and to parents in general.

B. THE PROBLEM

The aim of the pilot studies was to evolve a realistic basis for a new course in the psychology of parenthood. Needless to say the parent-child relationship has been becoming more and more difficult; as it is frequently so stated. There are very few specific publications dealing with the problem of preparing young people for the role of parenthood.

Students in psychology as well as in other subject-matter classes were questioned as to whether they felt themselves adequately prepared for parenthood. Almost all of them indicated that they were not; that, indeed, they felt woefully inadequate, despite the fact that many seriously contemplated marriages, and some of these students had already experienced parenthood.

While we have numerous manuals attempting to prepare young people for marriage, very few specifically deal with parenthood. To find some clues as to what should be included in a course on the psychology of parenthood, three pilot studies consisting of small groups of students, one each in the three terms of the Lake Erie College academic year, were undertaken. In the fall, the class consisted of seniors contemplating marriage, students who have been dating for at least four months; in the winter - young parents who either have a child or are in the process of having one, or are seriously thinking of starting a family; and in the spring, parents of adolescent children. The latter two student bodies were to be enrolled from the Community College.

C. THE METHOD

Two-hour weekly discussions of the students took place, with myself taking a limited part, consisting mainly in correcting concepts or fallacies and in maintaining the direction of the discussions toward the problems of parenthood. These discussions were taped and the tapes were examined for any recurrent themes, expressions of needs or concerns, that would indicate areas of difficulty experienced by the students in their parent-child relationship. The tapes were examined by my assistant who is an experienced researcher in Social Studies, and his conclusions are included in the appendix. In addition, each of the students undertook an independent research paper in any area of her or his own choice which either impinged upon the fulfillment of, or contributed toward the adequate expression of the role of parenthood. A list of the projects is appended in this report. Furthermore, each of the students was required to write a brochure entitled "What I Would Like" (in the case of the students), or "What I Would Have Liked"(in the case of the parents) "To Know About Parenthood".

D. HYPOTHESIS

It was felt that the recurrent themes of these three student groups would indicate the areas in which preparation for parenthood was presently and urgently needed and that therefore, these would constitute the most germane content of a course in the psychology of parenthood.

E. RESULTS

I The Recurrent Themes

Again and again the students in the three groups were concerned with the problem of reconciling three responsibilities:

a) to himself as an individual
b) to his marriage
c) to the children of this marriage - or the family

These were considered of equal importance. The neglect of any one responsibility inevitably affected deleteriously the others. At times the students recognized the necessity to "give" temporarily in the fulfillment of any one of these responsibilities but the primary concern, however, was the keeping of the three responsibilities in harmony. Particularly after the birth of the first child, either the father or mother is more likely than at other times, to neglect herself or himself, and the responsibility to the marital partner. The fact is that the infant requires constant attention. This pre-occupation sometimes became habitual, and the students felt that this must be prevented. Consequently, one aspect of the course must deal with a description of these three responsibilities and with some suggestions on the methods of fulfillment; the limitations that must be set and accepted; and where no compromise may be permitted without undesirable consequences.

II Twentieth Century Parent

The usual concept of the role of a parent was felt by the students in all three groups as being anachronistic, in that the parents tended to relate themselves to their children as their parents had related with them, and as the parents of their parents in turn related with them. As one student put it: "My mother goes back to the beginning of time". In other words, parenthood has to be modernized just like any other cultural or social phenomena. What was appropriate in an agrarian society, for example, where the family was essentially father and mother oriented with the children assuming adult status usually by the side of their parents at a far earlier stage than at present, is obviously no longer suitable. In our society, the family is becoming essentially matriarchic, and in the early stages of the child's development the father is "merely a visitor" and childhood is prolonged far beyond biological maturity. A great deal of literature in psychology, sociology and education can be helpful in this area, but the prospective or the existing parent is not much aware of this help. Therefore, the course on the psychology of parenthood will attempt an appropriate description of "the 20th century parent".

a) Children are not Extensions of their Parents

Unlike earlier times, the son does not automatically step into the shoes of the father. Consequently it is important that parents look upon their children not as extensions of themselves, but as separate individuals whom they are helping to guide and grow into desirable adulthood. Parents do not let go of their children. This was a recurrent cry, not only among the seniors that their parents had a tendency to cling to them, but also in the various investigations of teenagers in the projects that the students in the other groups undertook. Again and again it was reported that they "won't give us any responsibility; they do too much for us and they will not let us be ourselves". In other words, part of the course will deal with the fact that children are individuals and are not what is usually understood by the adage "flesh of my flesh, and bone of my bone". They need to live their own lives - to learn, to become self-sufficient and independent before they leave their parental home and before they marry. They need to acquire this separateness and freedom from the earliest possible moment. Consequently a part of the course will consist in defining what is really meant by the weaning process, both the weaning of the children from the parents and the parents from the children.

b) Parents Do Not Listen

Again and again among the seniors and in the research papers with teenagers, there is the cry "My parents don't listen". "I can't communicate with my parents". Most of the students, as well as the teenagers expressed a desire to communicate with their parents, but most of them said they simply could not, because the parents never listened. "Trying to talk to one's parents is like putting a Spaniard and Chinese together in a room and expect them to strike up a conversation". This is not only the cry of teenagers, but it is a recurrent theme among the students in their marriage relationship with their husbands. Somehow, somewhere, they have lost the power to communicate. "I remember when I went steady with

my husband, we could understand one another almost without words. I would start saying something and he knew the rest of the sentence". This type of communication simply no longer exists. One teenager said "I asked my parents if they ever communicated and they said 'Yes, when we were first married, but not any more'." "I asked them why - they said 'something happened - the children; the job; the house; just too many things and pretty soon there wasn't any time to talk'." "I asked them could they have prevented this, my father merely shrugged, my mother said 'Yes, if I had been aware of it'." Therefore, the course will include a section which will deal with the psychology of communication, which is essentially how a message is given and how it is heard and responded to. In this respect also, the course will deal with the psychology of listening - listening perhaps not only with both ears, "but with a third ear".

III Concept Correction

We all talk of the necessity to be honest; to respect other people; to respect one's self; to accept one's self; to deal with others on the basis of equality, but when we begin to apply these concepts, very little accurate understanding of them is revealed. My research assistant quotes a lengthy passage on the discussion of honesty because he sensed the difficulty that I had in conveying the meaning of honesty.

a) Self Acceptance

The same sort of lengthy discussion took place about such concepts as self-acceptance; treating others with respect; attempting to listen to and understand the desires of others; according others the freedom to be and to become what they want, and yet each of these recurrent themes led to prolonged discussions and a good deal of frustration, owing to the difficulty of conveying what these concepts actually meant. Anecdote after anecdote recounted some failure to apply one or the other of these concepts in a parent-child relationship.

Each time it was revealed that there was an unwillingness to accept or to admit that "the proclaimed prescription in the abstract had been violated in the specific". Consequently a part of the course will have to deal with what I call concept correction. For example, self-acceptance means acceptance of our capacity to experience feelings that are not acceptable to our Judaic-Christian ethics; the feeling of resentment on the part of a wife or a husband, especially at the birth of the first child - when the wife feels trapped by the constant attention the child requires and the husband feels neglected by the wife's excessive attention to the child. It is necessary to be aware of these resentments, admit them, and accept them for what they are - temporary feelings. With appropriate communication habits a husband and wife can talk it out. If this resentment is not recognized, or if it is repressed, it accumulates and finds a subtle or hidden expression of hostility toward the child or husband, or the wife, or guilt feelings that one has permitted oneself such ignoble emotions. Self-acceptance, in other words, means a realization that we are human beings and that we are capable of both uncondidtional love as well as resentment and hatred and revenge. These must be faced and controlled.

b) Honesty

Most frequently the students defined honesty as merely refraining from telling a falsehood or from cheating or from stealing. Honesty involves far more than that and it is necessary to make the parents aware that the sin of omission is often less forgivable than the sin of commission.

c) Equality

Equality means that members in a family are equal. Most often this concept of equality is boggled by the question "How can you expect a child of, say, a year to be equal with his father - how can he be equal in making decisions?" Obviously such a notion of equality is not what is really involved but the child is vitally involved

whenever his needs are central. Nobody but the child knows when he is hungry or when he is sleepy, or when he is uncomfortable or what he wants, and the conferring of equality must grow with the growth of the child. Equality means membership in the home. The usual concept of "as long as you are in my house you will do as I tell you to" alienates the adolescent, often causes him to marry prematurely in order to have a home of his own. A home is where a person lives with all the rights and privileges that come from living in such a place. The child needs home-membership and home-membership involves equality.

IV Mea Culpa

Another thing that will require attention in the course is the consideration of the capacity to admit that "I am wrong". Parents have been feeling that they must maintain a kind of God-like stature and therefore, can never admit that they are wrong. As one student said: "If my parents are willing to say that they are wrong on occasion, then I am willing to say that I am wrong; but if they pretend to be perfect then I have a right to pretend to be perfect". The concept of maintaining a kind of God-like pretense is deleterious, and it is very important that parents be themselves and act as human beings.

V Fulfillment Through Children

That parenthood is the ultimate fulfillment is another concept that needs correction, for otherwise it imposes a burden on the child. No individual should fulfill himself through the life of another person. Parenthood must be regarded as simply another experience. To quote one student: "Parenthood must be looked upon as one of a complex of relationships which will contribute to fulfilling life".

VI The Father's Role

It would be interesting to trace the origin of the stereotyped role of the father. Probably it has an ancient origin. In our present essentially matriarchal family, the father is impelled to play an aloof role in the home and to consider that the task of handling a small puny infant is beneath him. In any case, the prevalent attitude among the

male students is that they would have very little to do with their children until they could talk with them, and after that they would take over. Consequently the course will deal with the necessity of showing that permanent personality habits are formed before the child reaches such an age, and that it is essential that the father participate in the development of the child beginning with infancy. Somewhere we must correct the attitude that fatherhood at the early stage is not commensurate with masculinity. The students indicated that this attitude is not only held by men, but also by women who think that a father should take over during the adolescent stage, but not before. In actual fact, if you want to eliminate some of the present problems that we are creating in our teenagers, it is essential that the father deal directly with the offspring from the moment he is brought home from the hospital. Consequently, the role of the father will occupy a considerable part of this course. Again, this involves some concept correction. As one father said: "My wife won't let me bathe my infant son, she's afraid I may drop him", and as one student commented "This is nonsense. If a man can make tiny transistors or the little bugs - that threaten our privacy, he could certainly take care of an infant during a bath."

VII Comment on the Method

In the teaching of this course, I was most impressed by the method, which I call "the evocative method", as a teaching device. This is essentially the sensitization method, which is fairly prevalent at present. The students themselves without exception were most enthusiastic; they felt that they learned a tremendous amount from each other; that many of the problems which oppressed them seemed to be lightened because others have experienced them, and because they profited from the judgment and wisdom of the other students. They seemed to be refreshed after a two-hour session rather than fatigued by it; they kept on talking about the subject long after the sessions terminated.

F. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the course become part of the college curriculum; that a similar course be offered to seniors in high school, particularly those who do not plan to continue formal education. That the evocative method be used because not only has it proved to be an effective teaching device but it has the additional merit of being constantly revised in terms of particular students and their particular experiences. The course should also be made available to students in adult education and parents in general.

SUGGESTED COURSE OUTLINE

I. Start with a brief description of the aims and purposes of the course as are outlined in this report, and summerized by the title of The Psychology of Parenthood.

II. Describe the method which is really a process of discussion to elicit the ideas, thoughts, and feelings of the participating students.

III.
1. Make the first meeting a trial session, in which the students are encouraged to talk about the course as they understand it and this session should be taped.
2. Each student should have the opportunity to listen to the recording.
3. Each student should be required to note the points which particularly struck him in the tape.
4. Each student should be required to evaluate the discussion relative to pertinence, sticking to the point, and hearing what the other students said.

IV. This procedure should be followed after every discussion period and the instructor should select such concepts, ideas, and suggestions which are particularly germane, which may lead to insight into the parent-child relationship, and which have reference to the objective of the course.

V. While the content of the course should include contributions from the participating students, the instructor should have the following as part of his aim:

1. Harmonizing three basic responsibilities: to oneself, to one's marriage, and to one's children.
2. Given the present social condition, what is the role of the 20th century parent?
3. Emphasis on the fact that children are not an extension of their parents, and should be allowed to develop their own potentialities.
4. Dealing with the art of listening, particularly to their children.
5. Understanding the meaning of:
   a. self acceptance, b. honesty, c. equality,
   d. home membership, e. mother's role,
   f. father's role.

VI. In addition to the evaluation of the recordings, a student should be required (if it is for college credit) to do an individual term paper on any topic relative to the course which is of particular interest to him. For high school students, such an undertaking should be on a voluntary basis.

VII. At the end of the course, each student should be required to write a paper, evaluating the whole experience, not only in terms of positive benefits, but also in terms of criticism; that is, in terms of what helpful insights he gained, as well as in terms of what further exploration he feels are needed.

VIII. Should particular problems be expressed by students, such as divorce, living with grandparents, handicapped siblings, the instructor would do well to recommend pertinent reading material and perhaps have individual consultations.

IX. It is not advisable to assign reading material at the beginning of the course. This is because it limits the student's thinking to the content of the books. Reading material should be supplied as ideas and attitudes are developed.

X. The testing of the course should consist in:

a. Term paper.
b. Research project.
c. Objective questions, based on the content of the course.

H. APPENDIXES

I List of projects

STUDENTS - FALL TERM

STUDENT	SUBJECT
NB	Study of Problems of Parenthood, with emotionally disturbed and/or mentally retarded children.
JG	Inter-faith marriages from the point of view of children.
LH	The reason why Mothers send their children to Nursery School
PP	Study of famous people - (artists, writers...) - of their childhood surroundings and of the families they create.
CT	A bibliography of books and articles that may be helpful in directing thought toward parenthood and away from childhood.
MU	I am talking with "lower class" parents (mothers) concerning religion, sex, friends, and marriage.
ME	Talking with young single men graduates concerning their attitudes toward parenthood.
KW	Creative dramatics - video-taped of five-year olds, as they reveal their feelings reflecting parental and family relationships.
SW	Interracial Marriages - (The child's adjustment problems).

STUDENTS - WINTER TERM

EA	Compared the attitudes of parents and their high school children vis-a-vis a pre-parental course.
KB	Studied the attitudes of husbands of working mothers as their absence from home affected the family.
PI	Investigated the opinion of a group of married couples relative to the difference between their marital and parental roles.
SM	Studies the parental attitude toward one of their disturbed children (case study).
EP	Compared the Christian Marriage Sacrement with some of the feelings and opinions revealed in the group discussions.

TS Studied parents of two delinquent children in his neighborhood.

CY Studied the procedures of several churches of her neighborhood in their attempt to give pre-parental preparation to couples before their wedding.

RV Studied parental attitudes in inter-faith marriages.

STUDENTS - SPRING TERM

JRA The Right of Women to find creative expression outside the home.

BB Communication conflicts between parents and their adolescents.

JC The generation gap (Parent - adolescent Communication)

ED The College Question and parental pressures.

MD Family disorganization and the parent-child relationship.

ME The male parent versus Masculinity.

DH The parent-child relationship following family disorganization (divorce).

AM Christian young people speak.

HLN Attitudes of parents of abnormal children.

JP Divorce and parenthood.

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III RESEARCH ASSISTANT'S REPORT

My role as research assistant in this experiment in training people for parenthood was to view the training sessions from a distance - as a non-participant observer- in an attempt to objectify the evaluation of the training process. Ideally, of course, the evaluation of a training program is based on an evaluation of the post-training performance of trainees. A good training program will result in good trainees at a relatively low cost. However, in this instance, such an approach was not possible. There are no objective measures of good parenthood, and furthermore, we were in no position to observe the trainees in parental role behavior either before or after their participation in the program. Rather, we have only a record of what the trainees said about themselves before, during, and at the end of their participation. I share this information with the conductor of the training sessions, and much of the analysis I can make could also be made by her. In fact, all I can contribute is that objectivity which results from a less personal involvement with the trainees, and the difference of perspective which stems from my training as a sociologist, as distinct from her training as a psychologist.

Method

Each of the training sessions was recorded on audio tape. Most of them were also transcribed. The recordings and transcriptions, along with the application questionnaires and research papers of the students constitute the data on which this analysis is based. My original plan was to utilize a formal content-analysis technique to identify the relative importance attached by the trainees to various problems of parent-child relationships. However, this plan proved to be impractical primarily because the conversation in the sessions was often so complex, that several points were being developed at once, with an anecdote offered for one purpose being "milked" for several other purposes by the participants. To have classified and counted such rich material would have been to rob it of its wealth, and to impose a simple structure on what is really most complex.

Therefore, my account is based on a view of the whole as revealed in the transcripts, tapes, applications, term papers and final notes. My attempt is to generalize about

what these trainees have been grappling with, and to judge the kind of sense they made out of their experience.

Discussion

Perhaps the most striking thing that was confirmed by the trainees in their interaction was just how complex the role of parent is. The complexity exists in two forms. One results from the fact that one is seldom only a parent. One is also a husband or wife, son or daughter, brother or sister, a member of a community, a worker, a student or a housewife, and a "person". Much of the discussion of the parent groups involved conflict among these various roles. For instance:

> Female: I have a point that I would like to have discussed. I am divorced, and it was a great issue in my previous marriage over the role of the father and the role of the mother, and I've always had this idea...that adults as parents, especially parents of adolescents, accept responsibility to the community in which they live, either to take part in discussions or to take part in minor politics..... just to participate as individuals and not to be so much self-concerned as totally concerned..... because I feel that children.....look to their parents as examples.....
>
> Instructor: This was a problem in your marriage?
>
> Female: Yes. Because he said, "why didn't you tell me this before".....we were married too young, of course, and we didn't have discussions on things like this.....I feel very strongly about it and I just wondered if others do, or if I'm wrong.
>
> Male: ...thinking back in my childhood, my father, who was gone almost every night, was the chairman of the Cancer Society, the Heart Fund, all sorts of things. Consequently, all of us grew up in this atmosphere expecting that this was something that was expected of an individual. Everybody did it, at least our father did it and so everybody else, too...this very possibly shaped my viewpoint toward this. Along these lines.....there seems, shall we say in the more culturally deprived areas, almost a complete absence of such a feeling of responsibility amongst the adolescents...because the parents do not

become involved. One of the problems, I understand they've been having in the ghetto areas and in some of the poverty programs is getting these adolescents, finding jobs for them and getting them to go to work because many of them have come from a family where there was no pattern -- there was none expected, to wake up at 6:00 o'clock in the morning and get ready to go to work. When they did find them a job and got them to that point where they did know they were supposed to be at a certain place at a certain time they might not have brought a lunch or made provisions for purchasing a lunch. This seems very strange and very basic but I don't think there's too much of a question that they pick up these points of view from the parents, and it would certainly seem to be a fair value judgment to say involvement is good.....

Female: If a father is working all day long and he comes home in the evening and has all these extra responsibilities, where does the discipline of the children lie? It lies with the mother. I think there's a time and place for civic responsibilities and one of them is when the children are grown or feel that they are on their own. But when they are young they need a father just as much as they do a mother.....

Female: Most of the civic meetings my husband is involved in don't start until 8:00 o'clock, and when the children are small they are mostly in bed by that time, so I think it's very important that they are involved in civic organizations. If they don't help run it, who will?.....

Male: It's funny that a young man who is interested in getting into these civic activities because it might be expected of him from a professional standpoint -- the job that he has he should be active in local organizations -- this time of peak activity also seems to come at a time when the child is young... and this does create pressure.....

Another typical discussion went like this, concerning marital adjustment and parenthood:

Female: I think there is very definitely a pattern

that a man and a woman make that is always felt by the child...if the parents are well adjusted... I realize there are exceptions...but on the whole I think they reflect the parents (attitudes).

Male: I think probably the biggest difference that I notice is when my wife and I used to plan for two, and we now have to plan for three, and my wife and I both love to dance and I really can't remember the last time we've gone dancing...we both have parents that are continually asking us when we are going to go out, that "we want to watch him"... but we both feel, especially me, that I don't feel that I spend enough time with him now -- I come home from work, eat, and all I see of him mostly is waving good-bye to me. I think, though, the biggest thing is we have one more that we have to include in plans. There were plans that you and your wife had that have to include another one, it's an adjustment to make the realization that maybe things you were able to do alone are a little harder to do when there's a child around.

Female: We definitely noticed this because my husband works odd hours. He works in a bakery... and in a normal situation where the husband comes home at 6:00 o'clock at night you can sort of have your day arranged that you have dinner and the child is there and when he goes to bed you have a private time when you have conversation with your husband, whereas this is hard because Caroline is up whenever my husband is up to leave for work and she usually goes to bed about the same time he leaves, and it's a pulling between who do I take care of first, his needs before he goes to work or go after my daughter, who, of course being small has to be taken care of, and it's an adjustment for all three to make.

Female: I think that once we do have children we're going to have a big adjustment to make, because we're used to going every night...going out to dinner, going to visit friends, and I know most of our friends are married and have little children, and it's not a look of envy but it's, I think, a look of wistfulness more than anything else -- they wish they could go out and they can't. I think that

once we become parents we will have to accept and adjust to being limited to what we can do.

Female: Don't you always feel the grass is always greener on the other side? That when you don't have children you feel it would be wonderful to have children...it works both ways.....

Female: I didn't mean to interrupt, but I would say ideally children should enrich the marriage, but this isn't always the case.

One of the trainees, as part of her research problem, asked fifteen grandmothers this question: "What are some specific troublesome problems husbands and wives have as a result of the change it makes in their lives when they become parents?" Fourteen of the respondents mentioned the role conflict between wifehood and motherhood!

The college seniors in the program were also concerned with parental role conflicts, but in a different way. One exchange went like this:

It really disburbs me about my mother, and this is probably impertinent; I've read some of the letters that she wrote to my father and to different relatives, like my grandfather and he kept all the letters my mother wrote to him and my mother had them in the house and I was reading them, and...her whole style of writing was so much more creative and her vocabulary was so much more extensive than now. She did go to college, she majored in journalism and she knew her field and she worked afterwards, but housewife routine just -- she writes a good letter even now but -- it seems like she's really gone down hill intellectually.

Do you think that the role of housewife and homemaker subdues the level of intelligence so that the level drops?

I think it has to. Mother doesn't take housework or cooking as an art or science, she doesn't really take it seriously. She dabbles...she's in everything, like Cub Scouts and Sunday School.

It seems like while you're raising children there shouldn't be any decline, there's so much to do, you should be this busy. I think after the children are away from home, like 25 to 30 years of marriage, it's important for each of the parents to have something else besides daily routine to hold them together, like clubs to keep up their interest, because I think you could become stale and miserable and restless.

The thing is not to wait until the children leave the house to worry about becoming active in society. You get the feeling your parents are somehow isolated from the rest of the world, and all that you're doing is studying, especially in high school, everything is so new and you're so excited about all these things, you come home and your mother asks you surface questions, and that's hard to accept.

They were, in other words, deeply concerned with the possible conflict between parenthood and self-fulfillment:

One question I asked, and that we discussed, was what a good parent was that is coincident with what a good person was. I just wondered what the difference was, or what was more essential to a good parent than to a good person, or if there was any difference, really.

Taking it from the opposite angle, can a good person be a lousy parent? It seems like it would be easier to approach it from this angle.

We talked about a self-actualizing person. Can a self-actualizing person be a good parent?

A parent is a person, and I think that the qualities of being a person and being a parent should be combined and should intertwine. I don't think there should be a dividing line between the two. Am I getting your point wrong?

No. I don't have any clear idea. I wondered why the course is considered to be on parenthood, we could have a course on self-actualization.

Instructor: What you are saying is, why are we

talking about the psychology of parenthood? Why are we not talking about the psychology of being a real person? Is it identical, is it the same thing, or are there some particular kinds of qualities which describe a good parent that do not necessarily mean the same thing in being a good person?

Basically, I would say it's just the difference in the relationships, for example the relationship between one person and his peers, and between one person and his child. One of the problems of parents is that they try to impose their own ideas on the child rather than relating to him as a unique being in his childhood, rather than as a person at his own level. I think that the self-actualizing person wouldn't have any problem because that is one of the qualities of a self-actualizing person; he is one who doesn't try to categorize people.

This kind of discussion tended to predominate in the early sessions of the training programs. There is, after all, quite a lot of popular literature about conflicts between one's role as parent and other roles one plays, and the students brought awareness of those conflicts to the training program. Later discussions focused on role complexities of the second sort - those which result from the centrality of the parental role to peoples' lives.

Let us consider, for a moment, just what a social role is. It is a set of normative prescriptions which specify how a person occupying a given social status ought to think, feel, and act in the social situations that are likely to arise. In formal groups, organized for a specific set of tasks, the normative prescriptions are in large part explicit, formally learned, and widely shared. As the social group involved is increasingly informal - more primary - more and more of the prescriptions are implicit, informally learned, and differentially valued.

We can classify the normative prescriptions of any role as being specific, general, or transcendental. Specific normative prescriptions are learned in the on-going social relationships. They are those which deal with the other persons involved as idiosyncratic individuals. They are learned in the give-and-take with those others, and they change as each of

the actors in the social relationship changes. They are what makes each social relationship unique, and they are hard to make explicit. Ususally, they are expressed a qualities of self or other. For instance, two of the college seniors said:

> As far as competition between brothers and sisters goes, I think that's where the whole problem lies, because when I was 10 or 14 I was constantly compared to my older sister by my peers and by her peers, and they would tell me things. I repeated some of the things they told me to my sister two years ago and she was horrified, and yet she can't understand why there's no competition between us. I never felt like I had to compete. Everybody on the outside was telling me I should compete with her but I never felt as though I should because something in the home is done right. I just feel it. I don't know what it is.

> I have a sister four years younger than I am, and when she was just getting into high school and getting all the teachers that I had and I was in college, this was the worst time for us, and I was completely unaware of this. I was in school and writing home and my parents would write me and tell me all the news of the family and only when I came back for vacations did I realize that communications were almost impossible with this one sister, and I couldn't understand it. Finally it came out when I talked to my parents. My parents couldn't help. My father said, "I don't know what to do. I guess we've talked about your going to college too much". So my sister and I started writing the second year in college and in this way we overcame that.

General normative prescriptions are those which apply to all social statuses similar to the one under consideration. These prescriptions, such as, "the father should be a masculine model for his sons," may be learned in the on-going relationship, but are also available from other sources, such as formal training in school, other people who occupy similar statuses, popular culture, and while playing roles reciprocal to the one in question.

Sometimes some general prescriptions are found to conflict with specific ones. For example, among the parent groups:

Female: I remember reading a letter to somebody who answers letters in the paper. Her child was always having to be called and called to get ready for school, and so the doctor told her to let him... miss the bus, see what happens. Then he was never late after that. So with my own child, I didn't call him after a couple of times and he was late once and now it actually worked...of course, I have to awaken him but I don't (call and call and call)... and if they don't get to bed early enough they know they can't get up. My daughter always gets to bed by 9:30...and she knows that she can't get up if she doesn't go to bed on time.....

Instructor: We always suggest that you make a contract with the child...then see to it that he lives up to the contract. But you let him decide the conditions, and not you. You only see that he abides by the contract.

Female: Except that we are competing with so many outside forces in raising our children. This isn't just a contract between parent and child because there's that television that's impinging on our authority...this child may be perfectly willing to go to bed...at a particular time until he or she finds out that there's something on television that they particularly want to watch. We've got all of these outside forces threatening us.

Instructor: You have to realize that your children live in a different world from you.....and that is why you let them have a voice as to the conditions of the contract.

Female: I agree, but in my own particular case I know that I would be almost leery of making a contract with them because they would probably agree to go to bed at 10:30 every night knowing the responsibilities that they had the next day...but I've seen how they act when they don't get enough sleep.

Those general prescriptions learned while playing the role reciprocal to the parental role that is, that of child, were particularly of concern, perhaps because the trainees identified so intensely with their parents that they felt constrained to defend them:

I used to have a very similar thing with my sister and my father. They used to fight all the time, and yet I would never fight with my father, we just seemed to blend together more. And I always felt that he liked me better than my sister, but yet I knew he loved us the same way. He would never give more attention or anything. But I feel like I'm special.

This, despite the fact that all were agreed that invidious comparison between children was wrong.

On the other hand, parent-child relationships are so intense and so ambivalent that the memories of some trainees were harshly negative about their parents:

I remember getting flowers from my boyfriend and putting them in a vase and telling her about it at the end of the day, and she was angry that I got the flowers. She would tell me it was a waste of good money. And I was just angry.

I can remember coming home and saying, "Mother, I've been elected Homecoming Queen", and she said, "How much is it going to cost?" She wasn't thinking about how much it meant to me at all. There was just total lack of communication. I was never so hurt in my whole life. I never wanted to see her again.

Transcendental normative prescriptions are those that apply not only to the role of father or mother, but to many or all social roles that one plays. Such prescriptions as "be honest" and "give of yourself to others" are examples. One might think that since such prescriptions do transcend the many roles people play, that they would be the most readily accepted in the parental role. Actually, however, these transcendental prescriptions occasioned the most conversation during the later sessions.

Male: I had an experience this weekend that might be worth sharing. We visited a young couple out of state, married about 7 months ago...the gal had been married previously and has a little girl 4 or 5 years old. The little girl and the new father get along just beautifully. There is a rapport that really

snowed me. I spent almost a day with them in a car going for a ride and the discussions between this little gal and this fella' were really something to behold. His explanation of things to her, going into fantastic detail, very well done. And at other times he would sit there and lie to her - the biggest fairy tale about anything that you could imagine and wink and say, "I do this all the time." This girl is a very bright, intelligent and imaginative little gal,and he says,"I snow her so badly and give her so much fact that she's beginning now...to see the difference in some of it. I'm going to keep this up...keep snowing her to the point that nobody is ever going to be able to put anything across on her. Teach her to separate the truth from the fiction." Whether it will work is difficult to say...the close rapport between these two. His wife's previous husband was Puerto Rican and this little girl is very dark. We were driving along and he's chatting with her, and he called her a "Spick", and it hit me hard right at the time...and then it finally sunk in why. Sooner or later she's going to hear this from somebody else...and she's hearing it now from somebody that she loves and trusts, and it didn't mean a darn thing.

Instructor: ...I disagree with you. I think that she is going to distrust anything he says, and she'll learn the fact that he is a prejudiced man, and at the least she is going to learn that he is crude...or he wouldn't say things like that, and I think that this rapport can boomerang very badly.

Female: Even a questioning of his love for the little girl. I wonder if deep down he doesn't resent her tremendously.

Male: I know these people rather well...and I'm sure that this is not the case.

Female: If he can snow her, how badly can he snow you in front of company.

Male: Oh, he can't.

Instructor: You knew he was lying to her, so he

didn't snow you.

Male: ...it's difficult to communicate the personalities involved. I know him very, very well.

Instructor: One cannot make a categorical statement about it, but I think as long as you brought it up, I would like very much for you people to consider...what you think might be the necessity of honesty as being a prerequisite both of a good parent and a good wife or husband.

Male: Don't parents normally lie to their children?

Female: ...my daughter and a friend she had over to spend the night were watching a television program and it ended and was very silly and her friend made the statement that, "look at that - the woman loved her dog more than her husband - isn't that terrible." And my daughter, who is 8½, said, "no, it's not so terrible." I was in the next room. Her little friend said, "you should always love your husband more - women always love their husbands more than their animals or children", and my daughter said, "you can't always trust them," and then my daughter said to me later that one of her friends in school whose parents were recently divorced said that you can't trust men and husbands, and is this true? And I said, "no, you can trust people that you know well enough... what gave you the idea that you can't?" She said that her friend told her that married men sometimes say they're going somewhere else and they have dates with women and this is not good..."did my father do this?" I said..."no, men who are making a good marriage and are concerned, such as your uncle, your grandfather...they don't lie...people who are interested in being honest with each other don't lie...people sometimes say they are going to the drugstore and instead they go to the A & P or something. This is something different," and I never answered her question about whether her father did this or not. She probably didn't forget about it, but I just couldn't answer this honestly and I didn't want to lie to her, and I didn't want to say, "yes, your father did that," because she still has a good relationship with her

father. Now, should I have been honest?

Female: Well, you didn't lie to her.

Female: No, but she'll realize that I didn't answer her question.

Instructor: Honesty does not involve only an actual lie. Honesty is involved when you don't say what you should say and don't honestly answer the question...

Male: Speaking of lying...one of the lies that were told the little girl...the construction of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge came out pretty ridiculous. The foundation rested on tons of marshmallows, and things of that nature...or one of the best descriptions of the life cycle of a moth that I have ever heard. That type of lie...

Instructor: That's really not a lie. It's a fantasy. If the child knows that it's a fantasy then it isn't a lie, it's a fairytale.

Male: I doubt if this child really knew this was a fantasy.

Instructor: Then he had no business telling it as if it were a fact.

Male: But if she thought about it for a while it might sink in.

Another Male: That would be one type of lie.....

Instructor: But one must make a distinction between lies and fantasies, unless the person to whom you tell it takes it as a fact, then you have a responsibility to say, "this is just make-believe".. it's fun to spin a yarn like this...but if you know that the child knows that this is a make-believe...then it's alright because it's a creative process...honesty is an expression of intent as well as fact.

Female: Also, taking the age into consideration... because when the man calls her a name, I don't

care under what consideration it was, he's teaching her to do the same thing to someone else.

Male: Let me clarify...it wasn't a venomous name. It was like calling her "Nancy".....

Instructor: No matter how you call it, it's teaching prejudice.

Male: Is it teaching prejudice or is it teaching one to maybe learn about prejudice and to understand it?

Female: The same thing during this funeral business... at a previous interview...she had watched her little child watch television and they had this fun park I guess they called it, in their town, and he always wanted to go to it and he wanted to go that following Saturday and then she sat and she told him the people who stated this park weren't very Christian people and colored people aren't allowed in that park. And that was the first time she...They didn't have to bring it up in the way they did to this little girl. Is she that dark? I didn't object to what he said... that name didn't mean anything to me.

Instructor: It doesn't, but the way it was said it seems to me that it means like calling a Jew a "Kike."

Male: It's just a slang term for Puerto Rican.

Female: If he wanted her to get used to it wouldn't it be better for him to say, "some day you'll be hearing this word and they'll be talking about you."

Female: In the same way telling first of all fantasy and then reality to a curious 4 or 5 year old; he's losing a wonderful opportunity to teach the child because later on she isn't going to come to him to ask him.....

Female: ...I don't think you should every say something detrimental about a husband that's no longer with the family...it's ticklish.....

Instructor: Who says that being honest is easy. It's like being a Christian. Anybody can be honest

when it's easy.....

Female: Aren't children supposed to have a good memory of their parents no matter what they did?

Instructor: Not if you lie about it. She was expressing a judgment by omission...what she could have said, "Our marriage broke up - there was something fundamentally difficult between me and your (father) and what it concerned was that there was insufficient love between us." (Female: This was discussed before) Alright, then she knew about it. Then why not say that he was interested in other women because (your) marriage was broken up.

Female: You tell a little girl that?

Instructor: It's a fact, isn't it?

Female: My daughter babysits for a woman who is divorced and has 4 little girls, and she came home the other day and told us, "you know what Cynthia said? She said, "I hate my daddy," and my daughter asked her why she would say a thing like that, and she said, "because my mommy said I'm supposed to."

What is honesty? Granted that it is a fundamental and transcendental ethic, how does it apply to the parent-child relationship? These and similar questions haunted each of the training groups. Each spent more than half of its time discussing them, and individual problems relating to them came up time and time again, apparently unresolved at the previous discussions.

Why should this have been? It was not that there was disagreement as to the ethics themselves. All of the trainees were committed to basic Judeo-Christian ethics, and may professed to be deeply religious people. They each agreed with, and, indeed, in their summaries of the course, emphasized the importance of being honest, offering unconditional love, treating others with respect, attempting to listen to and to understand the desires of the other, and according others freedom to be and to become what they want.

Yet each of these themes recurred again and again. Anecdote after anecdote recounted some failure to apply one or more of these basic prescriptions to a parent-child relationship. Each time, a blindness was revealed, an un-

willingness to accept or admit that the prescription proclaimed in the abstract had been violated in the specific. Why was this the case?

The answer, I think, lies, paradoxically enough in the very depth of the commitment of the trainees to those ideals. The problem develops from the fact that many of the specific prescriptions that developed in the course of the trainees' specific social relationships stood in conflict with the transcendental normative prescriptions. For example, if you feel that your child would be dismayed and deprived if she believed her father to be a bad person, and yet you have separated from the father because you believe him to be a bad person, you may avoid discussing him at all with the child. This is, of course, neither honest nor open. However, you believe in honesty and openness. Here is the rub. You are behaving and believing in ways which contradict one another, and the result may be guilt, defensiveness, rationalization - and hence, more dishonesty.

I think it is apparent, therefore, that a basic accomplishment of these training programs was to bring about an awareness of the contradictions that often arise among specific, general and transcendental prescriptions for parenthood, and to make it clear that they can be resolved.

As one trainee wrote in her final report:

"Our group agreed that honesty is a prerequisite for parenthood; not the honesty that compels us not to lie, but the honesty which compels us to examine ourselves, our reasoning, our motives and our intentions."

Norman F. Washburne, Ph.D
June 10, 1968

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